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September 21, 2005



Local Governments Approve Ten-Year Plan to Save Salmon Habitat

Next Step is Ratification by City Councils in Southern King County

Everyone in Puget Sound talks about salmon, but what should we do locally to ensure the survival of this Pacific Northwest icon?

A five year effort to develop careful answers to that question concluded today with the approval of a ten-year plan for saving salmon habitat in the Green/Duwamish and Central Puget Sound Watershed, which covers most of southern King County.

The Salmon Habitat Plan recommends:

- 77 on-the-ground habitat restoration projects. Project examples include levee setbacks, reconnecting side channels to the mainstem of the Green River, adding spawning gravel to streams, placing large tree trunks in river channels to provide shelter for fish, creation of shallow water habitat in the Duwamish estuary, and removing some bulkheads on Puget Sound shorelines.
- 57 projects to protect existing high-quality habitat. Protection tools include purchase, conservation easements, tax incentives, and property-owner education. Purchase of property or conservation easements would occur only if owners want to sell.
- Policies to protect habitat and water quality that address land use, stormwater management, incentives for good property stewardship, and public education.

The recommendations are based on the results of years of scientific research that concluded in 2004.

A citizen-stakeholder Steering Committee developed the recommendations in the Habitat Plan in 2004 and early 2005. A public comment period in March and April resulted in hundreds of comments that were used to revise the draft plan.

The final plan was forwarded in August to a forum of the 15 cities in the watershed for their review. The forum also includes King County and the City of Tacoma.

At a meeting in Tukwila this afternoon, the member governments of the watershed forum approved the Habitat Plan unanimously.

The plan will next be forwarded to local city councils and the King County Council for ratification. The plan will take effect when approved by a minimum of five local governments that represent at least 70% of the 630,000 people who live in the watershed.

The highest-priority projects across the watershed – 56 restoration and protection projects – are estimated to cost \$198 to \$291 million over the next ten years. Funding is expected to come largely from federal and state grants for salmon recovery.

The watershed plan is part of a Puget Sound-wide effort to recover Chinook salmon, which are protected under the federal Endangered Species Act.

While focused on the watershed ecosystem and the needs of fish, the plan is expected to yield substantial benefits for people. An analysis done as part of the planning process indicated that the watershed provides “ecosystem services” worth \$1.7 to 6.3 billion annually. These “ecosystem services” include drinking water production and filtration, flood protection, natural stormwater management, storm protection, waste absorption, recreational opportunities, and aesthetic beauty. If the recommendations of the plan are carried out, they will help insure and increase the value of these ecosystem services.

For more information, please visit www.govlink.org/watersheds/ or contact Dennis Clark at 206-296-1909, dennis.clark@metrokc.gov.

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